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NOTES ON THE POEM OF ELHANAN BEN SHEMARYAH

THIS poem from the Genizah, which was published by Davidson in the *JQR.*, New Series, IV, 53–60, is of especial interest because, though we possess Gaonic Responsa addressed to Elhanan, nothing was known in print until now of his own literary productions. For it is hardly subject to doubt that the writer of this poem is identical with the correspondent of the last Geonim. The meagre data which we possess of Elhanan have been collected by me in my *אנשי קירואן*, pp. 13–14 (comp. also *ib.*, p. 47), among them being the fact that in a poem by Solomon Ibn Gabirol to Nissim ben Jacob (in Brody-Albrecht, *שער השיר*, p. 37) it is stated וְשָׁלוֹם נִמְלָא לְאַלְחָנָן חַנִּיכָו, and I ventured the suggestion that this reference is perhaps to our Elhanan. But at the same time I pointed out that this identification is impaired by the consideration that Elhanan was older than Nissim, for while the former was still ordained by Sherira, with whom he stood in mutual correspondence, the latter's relations were restricted to Hai alone. Davidson would like to reverse this relation between Nissim and Elhanan, and construing חַנִּיכָו in the sense of teacher declare Nissim a pupil of Elhanan. To prove his point he refers to the variant reading in *Mo'ed Katan* 25 b, בְּעֵת חַנִּינָתוֹ אָבֶד חַנִּינָו, instead of בְּעֵת חַנִּיכָתוֹ אָבֶד חַנִּיכָו. But this variant is certainly corrupt as proved by the continuation אָסִיקָו לֵיה חַנָּן עַל שְׁמֵיה, apart from the fact that the form חַנִּיכָו does not occur elsewhere in the talmudic literature,¹ and that חַנִּיכָה usually denotes *surname* (comp. Levy, *s.v.*). Besides, at another place in the same poem Solomon Ibn Gabirol employs the word

¹ Jastrow, to whom Davidson refers, is inaccessible to me.

וַיְחִי נָא בֶּרֶכה מְחַנֵּנוּ חַנִּיכָּר in the sense of pupil (ver. 6 : comp. furthermore my אָנָשִׁי קִירוֹן, p. 43). Moreover, Elḥanan seems to have been a pupil in Kairowan² and not the head of an academy. It is therefore most probable that the allusion in Ibn Gabirol's poem is to another Elḥanan.³

The contents of the poem are sketched briefly by Davidson, pp. 54–5. However, that Elḥanan refers to certain contemporaneous events cannot be gathered with certainty from the contents, although it is not impossible, and notwithstanding the fact that Elḥanan sojourned in all the lands which suffered at the hands of Ḥākim.⁴

Elḥanan's poem, like many others of this type, is written in the museic style, and Davidson has noted down the corresponding verses of the Bible. But Elḥanan also paraphrases talmudic-midrashic expressions, to which likewise Davidson should have paid attention. Thus, l. 12, neither מַעֲבֵר nor מַעֲבָר is in place, but מַעֲבָר, and l. 13 read תְּמִצֵּיאָה instead of חַמְצֵיאָה, for Elḥanan had in mind the saying of R. Johanan who interprets Deut. 30. 12–13 as follows (Erubin 55 a) : לא בשמות היה לא נמצא בנם רוח ולא מעבר לים היה לא. In l. 15–16 we have again a paraphrase of an assertion by Raba ('Abodah zarah 19 a) : כתיב בראש מרוימים וכתיב עלי דרך בתחלה בראש מרוימים ולבסוף עלי דרך. To l. 22 comp. Lev. r. ch. 19 beginning (see also Midrash Samuel, ch. 5, ed. Buber, p. 57; Cant. r. 5. 11. 22). קוצחותיו תלחמים אמר ר' שמואל ברAMI דברי תורה צריכין השורה שhortות כעורב . . . אמר ר' שמואל ברAMI דברי תורה צריכין השורה (this verse accordingly refers to the Law), and to l. 24 comp. the well-known maxim of R. Eliezer b. Azariah (Hagigah 3 b and parallel passages) : נמשלו דברי תורה לדרבנן : ... בעלי אסופות אל תלמידי הכהנים שיושבין אסופות אסופות ועוסקיין

² This I derive from Hai's Responsum (Harkavy, *Stud. u. Mitt.*, IV, 2) : ובשניהם נאנו אבינו נ"עسئل מ"ר אלחנן בן מ"ר שמריה אותו בתוך אנרת מ"ר יעקב בן מ"ר פטרון ותלמידיהם שהיו בקירותן וכו'.

³ Neither can Elḥanan b. Hushiel, Ḥananel's brother, be meant here, since he was already advanced in years when he came to Kairowan (see my אָנָשִׁי קִירוֹן, p. 13) and was likewise older than Nissim.

⁴ Comp. *RÉJ.*, XLVIII, 146, and the passages cited there.

ל. 33 read perhaps יְמִרֵי instead of Elhanan reproaches here those who ‘teach without understanding anything themselves’ (comp. *Sotah* 22 a: הניע להוראה ומורה כי רבים חללים הfilaה זה ת”ח שלא), and this will agree well with the continuation, l. 34: ‘when they are asked concerning many things in the Torah they become stupid (נוואל), comp. hereon *Berakot* 63 b: ולא עוד אלא שמטפסים כחוב הכא ונואלו וכחיב הותם אשר נואלנו and are considered as strangers (to the Law)’.—l. 43 bears an allusion to the fate of Hananiah b. Teradyon (*‘Abodah zarah* 18 a): הביאו והקיפו בס”ת והקיפו בחבלי זמורות והציתו בון את האור.—רואין אפרו של יצחק כאלו: (fol. 65 a, l. 41) instead of אֲפָרִים and comp. it to p. *Taanit* II, 1 (comp. also *Ber.* r., ed. Theodor, p. 513).

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